

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BONN 08679 01 OF 03 301646Z

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ACTION ACDA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SY-05 SCCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00

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SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 MC-02 ACDE-00 /076 W

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P 301631Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY BONN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0438

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BONN 08679

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, GW

SUBJECT: THEFT OF MUSTARD GAS

REF: STATE 121554

BEGIN SUMMARY: CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THE MISSING MUSTARD GAS CONTAINERS REMAIN CONFUSED. TWO ONE-LITER CONTAINERS OF THE BRITISH MUSTARD GAS CALLED "LOST" REPEAT "LOST" ARE UNACCOUNTED FOR FROM THE FRG'S ABC WEAPONS TEST CENTER 53 LOCATED ON THE MUNSTER-NORD TROOP TRAINING AREA IN LOWER SAXONY. A SURREPTITIOUS ENTRY INTO THE TEST CENTER OCCURRED ON THE WEEKEND OF APRIL 26-27, 1975. IT IS POSSIBLE--BUT BY NO MEANS CERTAIN--THAT THE CONTAINERS WERE STOLEN AT THAT TIME. ACCOUNTING PROCEDURES HAVE BEEN INCREDIBLY LAX, AND THE FRG IS UNABLE TO STATE POSITIVELY THAT ANY CONTAINERS ARE IN FACT MISSING. THE AFFAIR HAS RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE PUBLICITY IN THE GERMAN PRESS AND HAS BEEN THE SUBJECT OF PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONING AS WELL AS A GOVERNMENT STATEMENT. END SUMMARY

1. BASED ON INFORMATION FROM A VARIETY OF SOURCES AVAILABLE TO THE EMBASSY COUNTRY TEAM THE FOLLOWING ARE ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS POSED IN REFTTEL:

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PAGE 02 BONN 08679 01 OF 03 301646Z

(A) QUANTITY MISSING: TWO ONE-LITER CANISTERS OF

MUSTARD GAS. THE CANISTERS WERE FOR INSERTION IN A HOWITZER SHELL OF A CALIBER NO LONGER IN USE.

(B) MATERIAL IS OF BRITISH ORIGIN FROM WORLD WAR II. WHEN THE BRITISH GAVE IT TO THE FRG, NO PHYSICAL COUNT OF THE CANISTERS WAS MADE. SOME OF THE CONTAINERS IN WHICH THE CANISTERS WERE STORED HAVE DETERIORATED TO THE POINT WHERE UNAUTHORIZED OPENING COULD OCCUR WITHOUT TRACE.

(C) MATERIAL WAS STORED AT THE FRG'S ATOMIC, BACTERIOLOGICAL, CHEMICAL (ABC) WEAPONS TEST CENTER 53 LOCATED ON THE MUNSTER-NORD TROOP TRAINING AREA IN LOWER SAXONY.

(D) FEDERAL MINISTRY OF DEFENSE (FMOD) SOURCE RECENTLY TOLD AN EMBOFF THAT SOME 50 TONS OF VARIOUS KINDS OF POISON GAS SHELLS AND CONTAINERS ARE STILL STORED AT TEST CENTER 53. EVEN LARGER QUANTITIES ARE BURIED IN VARIOUS CONTAMINATED AREAS REFERRED TO IN PARAS 2.E AND 2.G BELOW.

(E) THESE ADDITIONAL CHEMICAL WARFARE AGENTS(LIKE THOSE WHICH ARE MISSING)ARE STORED AT TEST CENTER 53 FOR USE IN TESTING DEFENSIVE MEASURES AGAINST POISON GAS ATTACKS AND FOR EVENTUAL DESTRUCTION.

(F) THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY AT LUENEBERG IS IN CHARGE OF INVESTIGATING THE BREAK-IN AT THE SITE. THE FMOD'S COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE CORPS (MAD) IS SUPPORTING HIS EFFORTS.

(G) OUTSIDE SOME NEWSPAPER SPECULATION AND SOME (POSSIBLY-CRANK) CALLS, ALL OF WHICH WERE RECEIVED AFTER THESE NEWSPAPER REPORTS APPEARED, THERE IS NO REPEAT NO REAL EVIDENCE TO PROVE THAT THE MUSTARD GAS IS--OR IS NOT--IN THE HANDS OF TERRORISTS. THE BREAK-IN COULD HAVE BEEN PERPETRATED BY INDIVIDUALS IN OR OUT OF BUNDESWEHR UNIFORM WHO WERE ANXIOUS TO DRAW ATTENTION TO THE EXISTENCE OF THE POISON GAS, OR EVEN BY NON-CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BONN 08679 01 OF 03 301646Z

POLITICALLY MOTIVATED INDIVIDUALS. FOR EXAMPLE,ONE GUN COLLECTOR IS REPORTED TO HAVE OFFERED LARGE SUMS FOR A POISON GAS SHELL TO ADD TO HIS COLLECTION.

(H) THERE HAS BEEN PRESS COVERAGE OF THE MISSING MUSTARD GAS, INCLUDING ONE HIGHLY-COLORED ACCOUNT IN THE SENSATIONAL TABLOID BILD.

(I) PARLIAMENTARY STATE SECRETARY SCHMIDT OF THE
FMOD WAS CLOSELY QUESTIONED BY THE OPPOSITION ON MAY 14.
THE AIM OF THE QUESTIONING WAS TO SHOW THAT THE

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 BONN 08679 02 OF 03 301655Z

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ACTION ACDA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

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----- 123452

P 301631Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY BONN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0439

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 BONN 08679

GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN NEGLIGENT IN SAFEGUARDING THIS
DANGEROUS MATERIAL. MOST UNBIASED OBSERVERS WOULD
AGREE THAT IT HAD IN FACT BEEN NEGLIGENT. THE FRG HAS
GIVEN DETAILED ASSURANCES THAT ALL NECESSARY MEASURES
HAD BEEN TAKEN TO MAINTAIN PUBLIC SAFETY. FEDERAL
AUTHORITIES ARE OBVIOUSLY VERY DISTURBED BY THE AFFAIR,
NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF THE INCOMPETENCE REVEALED, BUT ALSO
BECAUSE IT COULD AWAKEN ANTI-MILITARY SENTIMENTS.
HOWEVER, THUS FAR AT LEAST, THE BREAK-IN AT THE SITE
AND THE TWO UNACCOUNTED-FOR CONTAINERS OF MUSTARD GAS
HAVE NOT BECOME A MAJOR DOMESTIC POLITICAL ISSUE.

(J) THERE HAS BEEN NO REPEAT NO ALLEGATION THAT
THE MUSTARD GAS STOLEN WAS OF U.S. ORIGIN. THE FMOD
ASSURES US THAT THERE ARE NO REPEAT NO U.S. CHEMICAL
WARFARE ITEMS AT MUNSTER-NORD.

2. THE BACKGROUND OF THE AFFAIR IS AS FOLLOWS:

(A) THE BREAK-IN OCCURRED ON THE WEEKEND OF APRIL 26-27. AN FRG INTELLIGENCE REPORT TO WHICH THE EMBASSY HAS HAD ACCESS STATES THAT THE AREA WHERE THE MUSTARD GAS WAS STORED IS 200 BY 300 METERS IN SIZE. IT IS SURROUNDED BY A TWO-METER HIGH CHAIN-LINK FENCE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BONN 08679 02 OF 03 301655Z

SURMOUNTED BY THREE BARBED WIRES AND AUGMENTED BY A ROLL OF CONCERTINA-TYPE BARBED WIRE. THE CENTER WAS GUARDED BY CIVILIAN WATCHMEN. OUTSIDE OF NORMAL DUTY PERIOD, THEY MADE THEIR ROUNDS ONCE EVERY TWO HOURS. THE CHAIN-LINK FENCE HAD A HOLE CUT IN IT 65 CENTIMETERS BY ONE METER IN SIZE.

(B) THE FRG AUTHORITIES RESPONSIBLE FOR SAFE-GUARDING TEST CENTER 53 HAD REPORTED THE BREAK-IN IMMEDIATELY AFTER IT WAS DISCOVERED. THAT REPORT RECEIVED LIMITED DISSEMINATION AND RESULTED IN FURTHER DELAY WITHIN THE FRG BUREAUCRACY. THIS HAS CAUSED GREAT EMBARRASSMENT TO THE FEDERAL GERMAN AUTHORITIES.

(C) ON MAY 2 SEVERAL GERMAN NEWSPAPERS CARRIED STORIES CONCERNING THE MISSING MUSTARD GAS. THEY STATED THAT 53 ONE-LITER CONTAINERS WERE MISSING. IN AT LEAST ONE CASE THESE STORIES ATTEMPTED TO LINK THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE POISON GAS WITH TERRORIST ACTIVITIES. THE INDIVIDUALS WHO BROKE INTO TEST CENTER 53 WERE TOLD VIA THE NEWS MEDIA THAT NO CHARGES WOULD BE FILED AGAINST THEM IF THEY RETURNED THE MISSING CONTAINERS. NO REPEAT NO RESPONSE TO THIS OFFER HAS BEEN RECEIVED.

(D) ON MAY 3 A BELGIAN HEADQUARTERS TRANSMITTED A REPORT CONCERNING THE MISSING MUSTARD GAS OVER THE NATO NETWORK. THE REPORT, WHICH WAS LARGELY OR WHOLLY BASED ON THE NEWSPAPER STORIES, STATED WITHOUT REPEAT WITHOUT ANY EVIDENCE THAT THE GAS CONTAINERS HAD BEEN STOLEN BY TERRORISTS WHO THREATENED TO USE THEM AGAINST AN SAS SITE.

(E) ON MAY 14 THE GOVERNMENT WAS QUIZZED IN PARLIAMENT ABOUT WHAT HAD OCCURRED. PARLIAMENTARY STATE SECRETARY SCHMIDT OF THE FMOD NOTED THE FOLLOWING: THIS SAME SITE HAD BEEN USED AFTER BOTH WORLD WARS ONE AND TWO TO DISPOSE OF POISON GAS WEAPONS. IN 1960 A GOVERNMENT COMMISSION HAD REPORTED ON PROBLEMS CONCERNING: (1) THE DESTRUCTION OF POISON GAS HANDED OVER TO THE FRG BY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT;
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BONN 08679 02 OF 03 301655Z

AND (2) HOW TO DECONTAMINATE LARGE AREAS WHERE CHEMICAL WARFARE WEAPONS HAD BEEN BURIED AS A MEANS OF DISPOSAL AFTER WORLD WARS ONE AND TWO OR INTO WHICH CHEMICAL WARFARE SHELLS HAD BEEN TEST FIRED. SINCE THE SUBMISSION OF ITS REPORT, SOME CHEMICAL WARFARE ITEMS HAD BEEN DESTROYED. OTHER SUCH ITEMS REMAIN AT AN INSTALLATION ESTABLISHED FOR THE PURPOSE OF DESTROYING CHEMICAL AGENTS. THIS INSTALLATION IS LOCATED ON THE MUNSTER-NORD TROOP TRAINING AREA AND IS SECURED BY A "NATO FENCE" ERECTED IN 1974. OTHER MEASURES INCLUDED NIGHT SECURITY GUARDS WHO PATROL THE AREA INTERMITTENTLY AND WHO ARE ACCOMPANIED BY WATCH DOGS.

(F) SINCE THE BREAK-IN (WHICH OCCURRED ON THE WEEKEND OF APRIL 26-27), ADDITIONAL SECURITY MEASURES HAVE BEEN INSTITUTED: A SECOND FENCE, ELECTRONIC ALARMS, INCREASED GUARDS, ETC. FRG LABORATORIES HAVE TESTED SOME OF THE REMAINING LOST-TYPE MUSTARD GAS AND DETERMINED IT IS REPEAT IS STILL TOXIC.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 BONN 08679 03 OF 03 301650Z

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ACTION ACDA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SY-05 SCCT-01 MC-02 CIAE-00

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P 301631Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY BONN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0440

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 BONN 08679

(G) ON MAY 26 A FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN STATED THAT TWO RATHER THAN 53 MUSTARD GAS CONTAINERS HANDED OVER BY THE BRITISH HAVE EITHER BEEN STOLEN OR ARE OTHERWISE UNACCOUNTED FOR. INVESTIGATIONS ARE BEING ACTIVELY PURSUED.

(H) THE FRG SPOKESMAN IN HIS MAY 26 STATEMENT ANNOUNCED THAT THE FRG HAS ORDERED A SPECIAL INCINERATOR COSTING ABOUT 1 1/2 MILLION DM IN ORDER TO DESTROY CHEMICAL WARFARE WEAPONS. TO DECONTAMINATE THE APPROXIMATELY 32 SQUARE KILOMETERS OF LAND IN VARIOUS FEDERAL TRAINING AREAS WHERE CHEMICAL WARFARE SHELLS HAVE BEEN FIRED OR BURIED IS NOT FEASIBLE. SINCE MANY OF THE CONTAINERS HAVE DETERIORATED, THE ENTIRE SURFACE AREA WOULD HAVE TO BE EXCAVATED 1 1/2 METERS DEEP AND THE EARTH THEN BURNED TO BRING ABOUT COMPLETE DECONTAMINATION.

3. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE BREAK-IN AND MISSING MUSTARD GAS CONTAINERS HAVE BEEN THE SUBJECT OF SEVERAL REPORTS TO THE ASSISTANT CHIEF OF THE ARMY STAFF FOR INTELLIGENCE. THE DEPARTMENT MAY WISH TO MAKE INQUIRIES FOR ADDITIONAL DETAILS WITH THAT OFFICE.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BONN 08679 03 OF 03 301650Z

4. COMMENT: FMOD AUTHORITIES ARE EXTREMELY EMBARRASSED OVER THEIR INABILITY TO FIND THE CULPRITS WHO BROKE INTO THE SITE OR EVEN TO DETERMINE IF ANYTHING WAS TAKEN. PROBABLY FOR THAT REASON, THEY WERE INITIALLY RELUCTANT TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT WITH US. PRESUMABLY ANOTHER REASON FOR THEIR RETICENCE IS THE SENSITIVE NATURE OF ANYTHING HAVING TO DO WITH ABC WEAPONS, EVEN DEFENSIVE MEASURES AGAINST SUCH WEAPONS. HILLENBRAND

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